

**Be Sure To Tell the Story**  
**Preached by**  
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**United Church of Fayetteville**  
**May 2, 2021**

**Hebrew Scripture Reading:** Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup>the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup>Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

**Gospel Reading** Mark 1:4-11

<sup>4</sup>John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

**Meditation: *Be Sure to Tell the Story***

There are many events in which it is a pastor’s privilege to participate. One of my favorites, possibly even the favorite, is being able to officiate at a baptism. Baptism has power and meaning as a sacred rite of the church—in which individuals, parents, children and, indeed, whole congregations have their relationships changed. Happening in the present moment, they are bright with possibility for the future.

They are memorable moments in the lives of a congregation and mark us in ways we cannot anticipate...

In the first year after my ordination, I remember my excitement at the first time I would be officiating at a baptism, or rather baptisms—those of two infants and an adult. I invited the households forward and turned away to pick up my book. When I turned back, in addition to the people I anticipated would be standing there, was a man none of us had ever seen before, with worn clothing who had obviously been living rough and had a bottle of not-water under his arm. Curiously, I had to look up the names of the people I baptized that day, but I can tell you the names of the people in the congregation that day. The sermon was preached in the pews that day as the people responded with extraordinary grace and sensitivity to our visitor.

There was the occasion when a couple in my congregation adopted the foster child of another couple in my congregation. As soon as they were legally permitted, they brought the young girl for baptism. On the day, there were eight pews full of biological, foster, and adoptive family members. Of course, when she left that day, she was family in Christ with everyone in every pew.

There was the baptism of a set of triplets. From the time they were born, the congregation scheduled people to help with 2pm feedings while dad was at work, play dates for the kindergartner, and date nights for the parents. In all that time, the only complaints I heard were from a few women of grandmotherly persuasion, who said, “My husband never changed a diaper in our house, but he is changing diapers in that house.” The congregation had been keeping for months the promises it would formally make on the occasion of their baptism.

There was the young Marine, who, on his return home after two battles in Fallujah, wanted to be baptized. On the day, he appeared in worship in his dress uniform. I gave him a heads up that I would need him to remove his hat before the baptism. When I turned to him on the chancel, even though I was standing right there and saw the whole thing, I can’t describe what happened next. I can only say I heard a snapping sound. Somehow, he removed his hat, tucked it under his arm and dropped to a knee in front of me all with perfect military precision and posture. I was not the only one who gasped at the powerful witness of both a man and uniform kneeling before God.

There are the stories of baptisms in this place: of a great-grandmother being the presiding elder at the baptism of her great-grandchildren; of a glorious splash party when we baptized all the children in a household in one day. There was the spring when we baptized five people in as many weeks—a more than month long celebration of faith and life. There was the young girl whose great aunt was a nun who came from far away to participate in the service; there was the woman who had been with us for a while and stepped up from the choir for a believer’s baptism. There were two confirmands who were also baptized on the day—believers’ baptisms at a different stage in life and an infant baptism. Not only did we learn about faith and life, we came to greater understanding of the power and meaning of baptism that binds us together, how we are connected with the whole Church in the world, regardless of our particular traditions, and makes us stronger as ministers of Christ.

But baptisms are only a moment in time, and all of those occasions have back stories and after stories.

Today, is the day we celebrate Bailey’s baptism. We know some of the backstory, at least as it is connected with our story. Christy and Lucas began worshipping here as a couple, married, and looked forward to Bailey’s arrival.

It seemed a very real possibility that when Christy played Mary on the Christmas Eve before Bailey was born, that Bailey would make an appearance during the pageant—which would have been EPIC and gone viral had Bailey personified the lyrics of the Christmas carol, “*now in flesh appearing.*”

But Bailey decided to wait a few more weeks. In February 2020, the Board approved her baptism at a date to be negotiated. Our only thought at the time was that we would be coordinating when all the family could be present. We had no idea how soon and totally our lives would be upended by COVID.

As spring advanced, Lucas, Christy and I talked about possibly doing a small outdoor service, but ultimately, they decided they wanted to wait until they could celebrate this important event with the congregation.

That’s the back story and here we are. Sometimes, it is easy to focus on the child and the family and forget the impact and meaning a baptism has for the whole community of Christ. This day and this occasion are a special gift to us as a congregation, gathering in person for only the third time in 14 months—giving us reason to celebrate, to look to the future with joy and to recommit ourselves to faithful living and the nurture of one another.

But today is not an ending. We have a key role in writing the after-story—not just for Bailey but for all our children. We need to be present and nurturing to these children, not just today or on other photo-op milestone days like those when we gift them with a Bible, or confirm them, or send them off to college.

We need to be present and nurturing to them, not just in historic ways, but in ways that pass on the gift of faith with means of expression that will be meaningful for the times and world in which they will live. The world is always changing and will continue to do so, not just because of a pandemic. The church has always been at its best and thrived when it responds to change instead of denying that change.

The world Bailey and all our children will grow up in and live in is not the world we grew up in. Our obligation to them is to fit them for faithful lives with an ability to maintain tradition or let it go, and to be innovative in response to a new day and new demands, all the while knowing they are indeed the beloved of God, with whom God is well pleased.

The promises we make today are not about today; they are our commitment to being authors and players in the after story of all the days ahead.

### **Response to the Word** *The Sacrament of Baptism*

#### **Invitation to the Table**

Friends: In almost all cultures, in all most all places in the world, after every sacred rite that changes the identity of the individual, the shape of a household, or relationships among its membership or with their God, the change is confirmed in the breaking of bread and the sharing of a feast.

These are the gifts of God for the people of God. Everyone, come to the table this day.